



MADRASAH EDUCATION:

What Creative Associates has learned



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeanne Moulton is Technical Director in the Education, Mobilization and Communication Division of Creative Associates International, Inc. She has many years of experience in helping improve education in developing countries. She has worked in the Asia, Near East, Eastern Europe and Africa regions, particularly in basic education. Her recent focus has been on strategic planning and program and project design and evaluation. Dr. Moulton also studies what has been learned from experience as guidance for current planning. Her current interest is work in fragile states. She has an Ed.D from the University of Massachusetts, a M.A. from Stanford University and a B.A. from Wellesley College.

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Jeanne Moulton
with Jon Silverstone, Uzma Anzar and Amir Ullah Khan

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INTRODUCTION

Millions of students in the Muslim world receive some or all of their formal education in a madrasah or madaris, plural for madrasah. Typically a madrasah provides young Muslims with a religious foundation in Qur'anic recitation and Islamic values. For some Muslim children, the madrasah is the only source of formal education that is available; for others it is supplementary to secular basic education provided in primary and secondary school. Since 2001 these Islamic religious schools have become a concern to some in the West, largely for political reasons. The image of madaris spread through the press is often negative and has spurred the international community to “do something” about the supposed threat they may pose.

The January-February 2006 issue of *Foreign Affairs* had an article on madaris that concluded with the following advice to U.S. policymakers:

What is needed most is a thoughtful, evidence-based approach to madrasahs. Policymakers should visit them, research them, and understand them, all the while being sure to understand that their actions could have unintended consequences.¹

Through contracts funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Creative Associates International, Inc. (Creative) has had the opportunity to work closely with madaris at the primary school level in four countries where Muslims are in the minority: the Philippines, India, Nigeria² and Uganda. These small interventions have given us insights into the workings of madaris in their cultural, political and economic contexts.

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to review Creative's work with madaris and draw conclusions from our experiences that may be useful for others who are designing strategies to support Islamic schools. Creative has worked with madaris on the basis of its expertise in the education sector. In each of the four countries, its aim has been to help the madaris improve the quality of basic secular education they offer. In each case, the work with madaris was one component of a larger project, of which the main beneficiaries have been children in government schools. In each country, the entrée into madaris was cautious and limited in extent, and occurred on different grounds. This is discussed in greater detail within the case studies. In response to varied situations, the objectives of the projects also differed from one country to another. In India, for instance, the focus was on improving the education of Muslim students in a few schools, and community members were the main constituents. In the Philippines, the education system was addressed at a higher level of government institutions, though the actual number of participating Islamic schools was small in comparison to public schools. In Nigeria, teacher education and radio instruction was the focus. In Uganda, Creative supported madrasah pre-schools.

¹ Evans, Alexander, Understanding madaris. *Foreign Affairs*, Jan-Feb 2006.

² Muslims comprise about 50 percent of the population in Nigeria, so are not, strictly speaking, a minority.

What insights we have gained have not just been technical, or pedagogical in nature; the opportunity to work with madrasah communities has enlightened our broader views on how the cultural and economic environment of these schools affects pedagogy and student learning at large. That said, we cannot claim that what we have learned has universal application, because there are madaris in a great variety of communities worldwide. Nevertheless, our experience has shed light on a phenomenon that, five or six years ago, was not well known or understood by many of those in the international community concerned with assisting in the improvement of education.

WHAT ARE MADARIS?

The term “madrasah”³ has varied meanings. Most generally, it is the term given in Arabic to any school, but it is also used to refer to specific types of schools. Madaris are at least a thousand years old. Accounts differ as to where madaris began, with origins being traced back to Baghdad, Fez, Morocco, and other rich cultural hubs in the Middle East. Today the madrasah typically functions as a privately-owned school where a religious teacher instills his pupils with the basic tenets of Islam and the Arabic language. The main subjects of Muslim education—the Qur’an (the holy book), Hadith (sayings of the prophet Mohammed), and Fiqh (jurisprudence)—are the focus of the curriculum, but there is no universally fixed course of study. The interpretation of these texts may also vary from one madrasah to another. Geography, history, science and math may also be introduced if the teacher is sufficiently well-versed in those subjects. The language of instruction is usually Arabic, though local dialect may also be used. Chanting and

rote memorization are usually the pedagogical methods employed and discipline is usually strictly enforced.

Differences between Islamic and secular education in the structure of education systems make comparisons somewhat difficult. Unlike in Western schools, under the Islamic education system students do not progress regularly from one grade level to the next, nor are there clear-cut divisions between primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, based on performance standards and examinations. Schools generally have looser time tables and students progress individually, with those who are more advanced helping those who have learned less.

Madaris vary widely in size and quality, and also in duration of studies. They range from informal religious instruction for young children, with classes usually taught at the local mosque or in private homes, to prestigious secondary schools. Most informal madaris offer a few hours of instruction over the weekend in makeshift classrooms. Some madaris are full-time, offering class five to seven days a week. A few well-endowed institutions offer a program of intensive study often leading to tertiary Islamic studies. Depending on the madrasah and its resources, classes may be offered to young children, from as young as pre-school age to older children and youth of high-school age.

PERCEPTIONS OF MADARIS

The events of September 11, 2001 led to the promulgation in the popular press of an alarming yet oversimplified and sometimes prejudicial portrayal of madaris. Based

³ The word’s spelling varies from place to place; in this report we use one common English spelling in the singular and plural: madrasah (singular) and madaris (plural).

on the finding that Osama bin Laden had supported and recruited from madaris along Afghanistan-Pakistan tribal border area, the media characterized these schools as dangerous breeding grounds for terrorism; fanatical in their teachings; funded by wealthy Muslim conspiracies in the Middle East; opposed to rigorous scientific education; and resistant to participation in the modern world. While there are instances to support these characterizations, generally speaking, they are misrepresentations.

Are madaris fanatical and dangerous? Foreign Affairs explains the popular view that madaris are inherently dangerous.

Madaris...have been blamed for all sorts of ills. Critics have denounced them as dens of terror, hatcheries for suicide bombers, and repositories of medievalism. These criticisms have focused on the few dozen Pakistani madaris that served as training grounds for jihadists fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Many of these jihadists went on to become foot soldiers in later campaigns, including those against Indian rule over Kashmir and against Shiite Muslims within Pakistan. They also helped forge the Taliban and gave succor and support to Osama bin Laden. From this record, critics have put together a seemingly convincing charge sheet against madaris across the Muslim world. They extrapolate from this relatively small number of problem madaris in Pakistan and conclude that madaris breed fanatics.⁴

But this is not the case. The picture of a madrasah is more nuanced than that of a monolithic medieval and

threatening institution. Although they are all dedicated to preserving and teaching Islam, madaris come in all sizes and shapes, with varied leadership and teaching styles and resources ranging from abundant (in a small minority) to impoverished (in the vast majority).

Many madaris are located in poor communities and provide essential social services: education and lodging for children who otherwise could well find themselves the victims of forced labor, exploitation, or other forms of abuse.⁵ Madaris may serve communities that government schools do not reach, particularly in rural areas. Even in the cities, where many more government and other private schools exist, madaris provide social services for Muslim orphans. Many Muslim parents choose to send their children to madaris because they consider the education they get there to be a respectable one. Girls are often allowed to attend madaris but not secular schools because parents trust that they are safe. On the other hand, many are woefully ill-equipped in terms of furniture, books, teaching/learning supplies, and even toilets, and some children are used by the imam teacher to beg and provide him with income.

Are madaris funded by religious extremists? Some are, but most are not. The largest madaris in India—those that extend to and sometimes beyond the level roughly equivalent to high school—receive over \$1.5 million a year. A portion of these funds may come from outside the school community but most madaris are small and exist on a few hundred dollars a year, which comes from parents. In any case, funds from extremists have only a limited influence on a small number of madaris. Even after five decades of funding from radical Islamists in the Persian Gulf, many

⁴ Evans, op cit., p. 9. This section draws from Evans, op.cit., as well as from our own experience.

⁵ Anzar, Uzma, and Amir Ullah (2006), USAID-India Madrassa Program Expansion, unpublished paper.

South Asian madaris are still run by teachers who reject Wahabbism and other extreme fundamentalist branches of Islam. In fact, across South Asia, extremists actually control only a small portion of the madaris.⁶

Are madaris opposed to modern education? Though there are still many small schools that teach in a style reminiscent of the ninth century—with no systematic curriculum and relying only on rote memorization—today this is not so common. In some countries, including India, there has been a sharp rise in English-language private madaris, since middle-class parents want their children to have the skills that make them employable. Reforms have also stemmed from the recognition by parents that madrasah graduates are more likely to access decent tertiary education and a wider range of employment opportunities if the curriculum is widened. Older madrasah students want to learn modern, useful languages and skills, as well as traditional Islamic subjects.

Do madaris stifle learning? Most madaris do not employ the methods of instruction that we have come to associ-

ate with problem-solving and critical thinking. Traditional curricula emphasize the supremacy of spiritual and moral values; application of knowledge to guide the conduct of everyday life; and intellectual quest as a lifelong endeavor. Also central to traditions of Islamic learning is the master-disciple relationship characterized by deference to the master. This relationship is sustained through face-to-face oral instruction that transmits not only learning but also spiritual guidance, moral authority, piety and blessing.⁷

The case studies will illustrate different ways and contexts in which madaris operate—for instance countries where Islam is a minority religion versus countries like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, where Islam is practiced by most people and, in the case of Iran, the foundation of government. As we shall see, minority status often brings with it challenges that go beyond religious beliefs and practices.⁸

Table 1. Summary characteristics of Muslim populations and USAID madaris project components in four countries					
	Total Pop	Total Muslim Pop %	Total Muslim Pop	Estimated USAID funding*	Project Length
India	1,092,222,263	16%	174,755,562	\$400,000	1/2004 - 8/2006
Philippines	87,857,460	5%	4,392,873	\$100,000	9/2004 - 8/2006
Nigeria	128,771,988	50%	64,385,994	\$1,000,000	5/2004 - 5/2009
Uganda	27,269,480	15%	4,090,422	\$850,000	8/2003 - 8/2006
*Source: U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2004					

⁶ Andrew Coulson, Education and Indoctrination in the Muslim World: Is There a Problem? What Can We Do about It? Policy Analysis, 511, March 11, 2004. C. Christine Fair, Islamic Education in Pakistan. U.S. Institute for Peace (n.d.)
⁷ M. Maqsood (1978), Moral Education in Islamic Schools in Northern Nigeria, Kano Studies new series 1/3.
⁸ At the same time, Muslim-majority countries such as Turkey, Morocco and Bangladesh are secular enough in governance and tolerant of religious diversity, and it is likely that many madaris in those countries are more like those in Muslim-minority countries than in the countries that, for one reason or another, are influenced by hard-liners. But since this study does not cover countries like Turkey, we can only speculate on this.

THE CASES

Table I summarizes key characteristics of the four case studies described in this report. As illustrated, through USAID-funded projects Creative Associates supported intense community work with madaris in Asia and Africa, with the majority of this work taking place between 2004 and 2007.⁹ These project components were implemented in countries with varying Muslim population sizes. While the Muslim population in Nigeria represented over 50 percent of the total population, in the Philippines it represented just 5 percent. Funding for madrasah activi-

ties ranged from about \$100 thousand in the Philippines to about \$1 million in Nigeria (since the activities with madaris were not funded separately from other project activities, these figures are estimates).

In each case, we first present the historical context and current status of Islamic schools at the primary level. This is followed by a detailed description of the project's goals, strategy and activities, and a summary of reflections on what we have learned from the engagement with madaris. Following the four case studies, we present our general conclusions.

⁹ These are not the only projects funded by USAID that reach madaris. Other projects serve madaris in Indonesia, Morocco and elsewhere.

Creative's support to Islamic schools in India ran between 2003 and 2006. Through the Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) project, USAID supported a local NGO by the name of Community Action Program (CAP)¹⁰ in its work with poor communities in and around Hyderabad. The activity had a budget of approximately \$400 thousand.¹¹

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The partition in 1947 led to the creation of India as a state with a Hindu majority and other religious minority populations. Islam is India's largest minority religion, with Muslims officially constituting 16.2 percent of the population or roughly 174 million people as of 2001 census. The largest concentrations—about 47 percent of all Muslims in India—live in the three states of Bihar (16.5 percent), West Bengal (25 percent), and Uttar Pradesh (18.5 percent). Muslims represent a majority of the local population only in Jammu and Kashmir (67 percent) and Lakshadweep (95 percent). High concentrations of Muslims are found in the eastern states of Assam (31 percent) and West Bengal (25 percent), and in the southern state of Kerala (25 percent) and Karnataka (12 percent).

During the Mughal period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Islamic culture flourished in India, madaris trained the intellectual and bureaucratic elite. With the onset of British rule in the early nineteenth century,

however, English replaced Persian as the official language and English law replaced Islamic law, weakening the role of madaris in Indian society. In the 1980s, South Asia, including parts of India, experienced a revival of madaris in both numbers and influence, often inciting tensions between Muslim and Hindu communities.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION TODAY

In terms of educational performance and achievement, the Muslim minority population in India generally fares worse than the Hindu population. Consider the enrollment rate of girls in government schools: nationwide, enrollment rates for Muslim girls are 40 percent, compared to a 63 percent rate among upper-caste Hindu girls.

This generalized picture, however, hides important regional and rural/urban variables. Muslims are generally more educated, integrated and prosperous in the Western and Southern states of India than in the Northern and Eastern ones; this could be due to partition, when the more affluent and educated population migrated over the border, to Pakistan in the North and Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in the East. These regional differences, combined with the rural-urban difference, are striking. According to one study, while only 12 percent of women are illiterate in urban areas of southern India, in rural areas of northern India 85 percent are illiterate.¹²

¹⁰ Formerly named Child and Police.

¹¹ This case is drawn from a report written by Uzma Anzar, a Creative staff member with oversight responsibilities for BEPS activities in India, and her colleague in India, Amir Ullah Khan.

¹² Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon (2004), *Unequal Citizens*, Delhi: OUP.

Among Muslims in India, 16 percent of girls from low-income households attend school, compared to 70 percent of those from more affluent households.¹³ This suggests that a family's economic status is an important factor for Muslim-Indian girls' school attendance. Meanwhile, the data collected in this project also suggests a preference among Muslim families for government and private schools, which could be related to the perceived quality of these schools as compared to the quality of education at madaris.

SCHOOLS FOR MUSLIM CHILDREN

Over half of Indian Muslim students attend a regular government or private school, in which subjects are taught either in Hindi, English or a local language (Telugu or Tamil for example). The others attend one of three types of schools serving Muslim children (though not every type is available in every community): Residential madaris, day (non-residential) madaris, and Urdu-medium government schools. Children enrolled in a government school often also attend a maktab for a daily lesson in reciting the Qur'an before or after their school sessions. Maktabas are usually small rooms within or attached to a mosque.

Residential madaris are large boarding facilities where the major focus is the high-level study of Islam. Graduates of these madaris become Alim (equivalent to a B.A in Islamic Studies) and Fazil (M.A equivalent and the highest degree from a madrasah). The ultimate objective for most students attending these madaris is to become spiritual leaders for their communities. Residential madaris cater to

less than 5 percent of the Muslim population in India and most students who attend these schools belong to poor families.

A day madrasah teaches literacy and numeracy along the lines prescribed by the Indian government, though the curriculum may not be in full compliance with the state curricula. These madaris are community based and operate on funds collected by the community. Most teachers have an Alim or Fazil degree but no formal teaching credential from the Ministry of Education. Parents generally send their children to these madaris to gain basic grounding in their religion and to get a better education than that provided by nearby government schools, where quality is perceived to be very low. A general estimate is that about 10 percent of the Muslim children residing in rural and urban area slums attend day madaris.

Data on the number of madaris in India and number of children attending them is elusive. Estimates range from 8 thousand to 40 thousand madaris. Following general demographic patterns, while the largest numbers of madaris are in northern and western regions, they are found throughout the country.

With limited access to good quality public schools, coupled with increasing identity pride and communal prejudices, poor Northern Indian Muslims tend to find refuge and comfort either in madaris or in the Urdu-medium schools that serve Muslim communities. This is especially true for parents of Muslim girls who believe that their daughters will be safer in an Urdu-medium school, since most of the

¹³ Hasan and Menon, Work cited.

children are Muslims. Some are willing to wait for long periods, even at the cost of permitting their children, especially girls, to remain illiterate until they can find space in an Urdu-medium school or a madrasah. This is the case even though the Urdu-medium schools offer no better quality education than regular government schools and have their own disadvantages—most Urdu schools, operated and managed by Muslims, have teachers with inadequate qualifications and little, if any, pedagogy training. Urdu-medium teachers may not be available for some subjects such as science, and Urdu-medium books are not readily available in the market.

SOURCES OF FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

Three kinds of funding are available to madaris: local charity, government grants given through madrasah governing boards, and overseas charity. Most madaris are governed by their owners, under the guidance of religious leaders, and have someone who goes door to door to collect money. Some madaris are given land, buildings and other property that produces regular returns. Only a small number of madaris receive overseas funds, and these are not the small community-based schools.

In some states, including Bihar, Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh, madaris are governed by boards that function like the school boards; however these are few in number. The boards set the curriculum and monitor the performance of madaris that are registered under them. They conduct examinations to qualify students to enter government schools after graduation. The governments of these states allocate some funds to madaris that are registered with the

madrasah board. Most madaris choose to operate without government grants, because they fear that government funding could lead to government intervention and that teachers supported by government funds would start behaving like other civil servants who know their salaries will be paid whether or not they work.¹⁴

PRESSURE TO IMPROVE MADRASAH EDUCATION

Many poor Muslim students attend a day madrasah because it is near their home, and there is little incentive to attend the local government school. The madrasah also gives religious instruction to children and helps the family preserve its Muslim identity. Most day madaris, no matter which Islamic school of thought they follow (Deobandi, Brailvi, and so on), are willing to teach secular subjects along with Islamic subjects. Most are operated by an Alim, who after graduating from a large madrasah has returned to his village, gathered other Alims and started a school. Although parents are attracted to the safe environment of this school, they are aware that a purely religious education will not help their children earn a decent living. They might request the Alim to add instruction in basic literacy and numeracy, even though he may hardly know the subject matter and may lack any training in pedagogy. The Alim is thus pressured to integrate basic subjects into the curriculum and improve the quality of instruction, so that more and more day madaris are either trying to register as government-supported schools or requesting local NGOs and state government authorities to help them expand their curriculum and train their teachers.

¹⁴ Amirullah Khan (2005), *The Madrasah Students in India*.

State governments show a willingness to respond to parents' interests. As part of efforts to universalize primary education in India, the ministries of education in all states have taken steps, within the constraints of their own bureaucratic structures, to enhance education delivery to Muslims. The intent is more advanced than the reality, but state interest in Muslim education seems to be growing.

THE USAID ACTIVITY

There are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of organizations engaged with or trying to work with madaris all over India. These include secular groups as well as progressive Muslim groups. Most of these organizations are engaged with small madaris and focus primarily on pedagogical improvements. The project that USAID funded through BEPS is implemented by one of these secular organizations. Community Action Program (CAP) has worked with a few madaris in the slums of Hyderabad, helping them introduce the government's education curricula into their programs; supporting remedial classes for children who had dropped out of school; and establishing vocational centers to provide tangible economic skills to Muslim adolescents in their late teens. These changes have taken place under the guidance and supervision of madrasah administrators and local Muslim community leaders.

GOALS

CAP's primary goal is to help reduce the numbers of children who work in hotels and other businesses which operate under unhealthy and often dangerous condi-

tions. In 1997, while addressing child labor problems in Musheerabad, a very poor neighborhood in Hyderabad, CAP began work in education as a means to stemming the number of dropouts and to make education an alternative to labor. Many Muslim children attended a local madrasah for only a few years, where the curriculum did not include or lead to opportunities to acquire the basic skills needed for employment. It became apparent that the education of Muslim children, especially of girls, could combine secular with religious education in madaris if Muslim children were provided extra tutoring to pass grade 7 and 10 exams. In 2003, CAP approached USAID for assistance, which was provided through BEPS. CAP's work in other community projects led community members to request its help in providing secular subjects in madaris.

STRATEGY

Since CAP did not employ many Muslim staff, it moved cautiously and hired Muslims from the community who were sympathetic to its concerns. CAP gave them clear objectives and trained them to implement the activities. CAP was also careful in its choice of words describing its objectives: it spoke of improving quality and not of modernizing, reforming or secularizing the madaris; such vocabulary can be misinterpreted as disrespectful of the age-old, pious traditions of Islamic education.

The first problem CAP took on was to help Muslim boys who had dropped out of school in grades 7 or 8 due to academic or financial difficulties, and who were either working or sitting idle. Many could not re-enroll in public

school because they had missed too many grades and, often, because the local government Urdu-medium school could not accept more students.¹⁵ CAP helped develop remedial bridge courses at a madrasah, enrolled boys, and worked with schools to re-enroll students who completed the courses. It also sought the help of local police in mobilizing communities and local businesses against child labor, and formed mothers' groups to monitor children's attendance in schools.

Over time, more girls wanted to go to school, and some of the mothers' groups asked CAP to help provide education for their daughters. They suggested that since traditional Muslim families would rather send their girls to a religious school than public school, CAP should work with a local madrasah, Madinat-ul-Uloom.

This madrasah was established around 1980 to provide religious education. It was funded by more affluent members of the community, who purchased land and built a two-room facility. Children who could not afford the nominal fees received scholarships provided by community contributions. Most of the boys also attended a government school, but the girls only attended madrasah to study the Qur'an.

Local Muslim leaders realized that while religious education was important, it was not sufficient to improve the economic well-being of the Muslim community. Recognition by community leaders of the low quality of public schools and the need for better education led them to introduce some academic subjects in the madrasah cur-

ricula. By 1997, the school had a three-story building (one floor of which was still unfinished), which could accommodate around 300 students in different shifts. The madrasah board hired a few female teachers to teach secular school subjects such as science, math and social studies. Although the madrasah now offered limited secular education in grades 1 through 7, its education level was not up to the standard and not recognized by the state. Students finishing grade 7 had either to give up their studies, repeat the grade in a government school, or hire a private tutor in order to pass the standard exam.

In 2003, CAP asked the madrasah board if it would allow CAP to use its facility for a bridge school to help boys and girls who had dropped out from a government school after grade 6 to return to that system. The board agreed, and the bridge school project was financed with seed funding from USAID. With this funding, CAP paid the salaries of secular-subject teachers, hiring three local Muslim women with B.Ed qualification to teach math, biology and physics in the bridge school classes. Students now came to the madrasah for six hours: two hours were dedicated to Islamic education and the other four hours to the government curricula.

As the bridge school got underway in the madrasah facility, many drop-outs re-enrolled. Because the quality of education was superior to that of government schools in the area, more children continued to enroll. Many girls left their government schools and joined the bridge school because it was located in a safe environment within the four walls of the madrasah. Slowly, due to the high passing

¹⁵ The government of India offers a special Urdu-medium track for Muslim children who want a formal education taught within their cultural traditions, but in many communities there are too few of these tracks.

rate of students in grades 7 and 10, the madrasah itself came to symbolize a forward-thinking and positive vision in the community.

Madrasah leaders were not as ready for change in their school as were parents. Even though the leadership of these madaris was progressive, they needed support—both financial and technical—to add secular subjects to the religious curriculum. They debated the change among themselves, and only after doing so, allowed CAP to work with them. They appeared to be keeping a close eye on what was happening and prepared to intervene if they detected problems. CAP kept them informed and invited them to attend training sessions with teachers to help them understand the curriculum.

EVOLUTION OF THE INTERVENTION

Witnessing the success of the bridge school, the madrasah leaders showed further interest in enhancing the educational quality of their own classes (grades 1-7). After discussions with CAP, they decided to increase the number of secular subjects and to improve teaching in the primary grades. CAP received additional support from USAID for this pilot activity.

While the bridge school provided adolescents with remedial training, CAP's focus in the regular primary grades was to improve the quality of instruction and offer academic education on a more formal basis. The primary-level teacher training provided by CAP included child-centered teaching techniques, sequential learning, development

and use of teaching materials, documentation, and spoken English. Life skills development became an integral part of the madrasah curriculum. As quality improved, more children enrolled in the madrasah. Within one year, the enrollment for boys and girls increased by 12 percent and 35 percent respectively.

CAP's work with the madrasah was an integral part of its larger effort to reduce child labor. It set up Children's Councils, which played an active role in bringing working and idle children into the bridge school. Community volunteers and caseworkers were trained to follow-up on children who had entered public schools and their families to ensure retention and curb dropout. Local committees were formed to monitor the progress of children who returned to school and their circumstances at home and to initiate necessary action. These committees were comprised of school headmasters, police inspectors, teacher and community volunteers, parents and social workers. Mothers' Committees informed other mothers about child growth and development and disseminated ideas, strategies and practices for parenting. The Mothers' Committees were used as an entry point into the community and helped in expanding the basis of the project beyond the CAP children and their families. Skills development programs were designed for parents and adolescent siblings (over 16) of children targeted by the program.

EXPANSION OF THE INTERVENTION

By 2004 word about the good performance of students from the Madrasah Madinat-ul-Uloom had spread to

other madaris in and around Hyderabad. These other madaris, which also wanted their Muslim children to get the formal education that would allow them to pursue further academic studies or vocational training, asked CAP for assistance. CAP requested additional funding from USAID to expand to another madrasah in a Hyderabad slum and one in Secunderabad, a city adjoining Hyderabad. The quality of instruction improved remarkably in these schools. In 2006, one school had a 100 percent pass rate in the grade 7 exam. Moreover, seven of eight children who took the grade 10 exam passed with 85 percent marks, which are rare. The other school experienced a 90 percent pass rate in the state's grades 7 and 10 exams.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

In all three madaris, CAP received USAID funding to start vocational training centers for the older siblings and for those who had passed the grade 10 exam. The centers offered training in skills such as computer-based multimedia, data entry, pre-school teaching, and automobile repair. By 2006 they had begun to expand skills training to customer relations services, bed-side nursing care, hotel and service industry skills (with a focus on spoken English), and additional computer courses.

The availability of vocational training has a particularly positive impact on girls, who can get low-cost training within their own communities. Tailoring, knitting and needlework are taught within the madaris to girls in their late teens. (CAP would prefer to offer training in skills for which there is more market demand, but many Muslim girls and women are not permitted by their families to work outside the home.)

CAP's strategy of bringing drop-outs back to school enlivened the community. Students who had earlier failed the government system started passing the exams after attending CAP programs. This change boosted the morale of parents as well as their children.

SUSTAINING GAINS

CAP continued to provide in-service training to teachers in the madaris. As teachers learned to develop new materials, they rewrote the Urdu-language textbook and teaching guide, with guidance from the CAP teacher trainer, and shared it with the local government education department, which in 2006 was considering adopting this textbook and teaching guide for all its Urdu-medium schools. Encouraged by this success, the madrasah teachers began cooperating on a similar book for the Telugu language (a key regional language in Andhra Pradesh).

In June 2005 CAP organized a conference at the state level of ministry of education officials, madrasah administrators and local Muslim leaders to share information about its work with madaris and to seek support in expanding and making this process more formal. The officials asked to visit the madrasah in Musheerabad and subsequently announced that they would provide it with accreditation and some financial assistance.

The Andhra Pradesh ministry, particularly the chief of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (the national program for universalizing primary education) took an interest in moving the pilot forward to all interested madaris in the state. CAP also contributed to state policies favoring secular courses in madaris. The ministry decided to allow grade 7 and

10 students from madaris to appear for the government board exams without paying fees normally charged to external students and to consider providing accreditation without the usual charge to any madrasah that introduces the ministry's Urdu-medium curricula in its plan of studies and meets requirements of space, qualified teachers and so on.¹⁶ For madaris that gain accreditation, the ministry agreed to pay salaries of two teachers, offer teacher training, make annual grants for developing learning materials and maintaining the facility, and provide free textbooks and a computer.

CONCLUSIONS

- In the Muslim culture in India (as elsewhere), the madrasah is the indigenous school, but it often fails to provide the practical skills and academic knowledge that parents view as important for their children's future. Government schools provide these skills and knowledge, but Muslim families are not comfortable with them. CAP provided an alternative that brought secular subjects into the schools with cultural roots. This was done more as a social service than a pedagogical intervention.

- If parents trust that their girls can learn in a low-cost and safe environment, they will send them to school. The combination of religious and quality secular education provides an added advantage since parents feel their girls and boys are obtaining a balanced education—one that provides room for and assigns impor-

tance to religious duties and moral behavior. This type of educational environment also ensures that Muslim children do not face discrimination.

- Providing extra tutoring to children who were labeled “failures” and helping them pass grade 7 and 10 exams was a crucial intervention. Encouraging failed Muslim students to return to an education system that had not welcomed them and preparing them to experience success had a profound impact on parents and community members. They realized that achieving success is not all that far fetched, and this ignited the flame of hope in Muslim communities.

- CAP is a secular NGO headed by non-Muslims. The experience has shown that secular organizations can work with madaris, especially if they establish their bona fides with the community first.

¹⁶ The ministry is also considering revising these requirements because particularly the space requirement can be difficult for small community madaris to meet. Until recently, a madrasah needed to pay Rs. 25,000-30,000 to gain accreditation.

THE PHILIPPINES (MINDANAO)

In the Philippines, Creative Associates, with funding from USAID, implemented an activity to support madaris in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The activity ran just under two years (2004-06) and had a budget of somewhat less than \$100 thousand. Though the intervention was relatively small compared with other project targets, its timing was propitious, giving staff an opportunity to help the education sector make progress on some critical policy issues and experiment with their implementation. The timing also put the project staff on an exhilarating learning curve and right at the center of the social, cultural and political issues that form the context of madrasah education.¹⁷

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mindanao is the second largest and southernmost island group in the Philippines. While Christians populate much of the Mindanao region, it is also home to the country's Muslim (or Moro) populations.

The roots of conflict between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao go back more than 400 years, when the Muslim and indigenous Lumad people of Mindanao resisted Spanish/Catholic colonization of the Philippine Islands. In the twentieth century the conflict heightened. In the late 1960s, perhaps spurred on by other third world independence movements, aspirations emerged for creating

a separate Muslim state in parts of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was formally established in 1988, incorporating four (and later five) provinces.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) formed in opposition to government policies and aimed not only to establish a separate state for Muslims in Mindanao but to create an "Islamic state." To check the growing strength of the MILF, the government launched a full-scale military offensive in 2000, resulting in the displacement of more than 900,000 civilians. Another major conflict between the government and the MILF erupted in early 2003, displacing at least 400 thousand people.

Limited economic investment in the region and dwindling public services (especially education) has led to economic stagnation, high unemployment, social frustration, and increased levels of conflict and criminality. Many fear that Mindanaoan youth—undereducated, underemployed, and frustrated by the lack of economic opportunity—are vulnerable to recruitment by criminal or other undesirable elements.

Against this historical backdrop of marginalization, conflict and poverty, one finds an education system that is struggling just to keep afloat. The ARMM region has its own Department of Education (DepEd ARMM) which is techni-

¹⁷ This case was drawn in part from a report written by Jon Silverstone, who was the Chief of Party of Creative Associates' education activities in the EQUALLS project.

Table 2. Comparison of ARMM schools with nationwide indicators		
Indicator	ARMM	Philippines
Completion of elementary school	33%	64%
Completion of secondary school (based on grade 1)	11%	51%
Average score on National Achievement Test – Grade 6	47%	63%
Average score on NAT - Level IV High School	37%	51%
Illiteracy	30%	7%
Functional Illiteracy	39%	15%
Households with no formal education	27%	3%
Out-of-school youth	23%	13%

cally independent of the National Department of Education (DepEd). With a severely limited tax collection system and limited support from the National DepEd, the DepEd ARMM can barely make ends meet. The system faces massive challenges in terms of access: damaged or destroyed school buildings, overcrowded classrooms, grossly insufficient supplies, and a dearth of bridging mechanisms to encourage dropouts and displaced children to re-enroll in the school system). In terms of quality, notable shortcomings include under-trained teachers and a severe shortage of textbooks and instructional materials. To make matters worse, corruption is widespread, leading to late payment or nonpayment of teacher salaries; textbooks that are paid for often don't arrive; and there exists a host of other debilitating afflictions that reduce people's confidence in the school system.

Recent statistics published by government and other organizations indicate that children in the ARMM are severely disadvantaged in contrast to the larger Philippines' population, as illustrated in the table above of education indicators.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION TODAY

As early as the 14th century, Muslim communities in Mindanao supported their local madaris as an expression of piety. Throughout the centuries of Spanish and American colonialism, the madrasah remained a central feature of Muslim life in Mindanao. Today there are madaris scattered throughout the Philippine islands, but the overwhelming majority can be found in Central and Western Mindanao. The number of madaris in Mindanao is estimated to be between 600 and 1,000 and the student population is between 60,000 and 100,000. The provinces with the largest number of madaris (over 100 madaris in each) are Lanao del Sur, Basilan, and Maguindanao.

Most madaris in the Philippines are small schools owned and operated by one or more teachers who have received an Islamic education in the Philippines or abroad. They offer varying quality of Islamic education but no instruction in secular subjects. Most madaris operate independently and do not receive any systemic support. Some may get support from a religious institution in the Middle East or South Asia (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan are frequently cited), but for the most part each school is on its own, unregulated and under-funded. Most have no books.

Some madaris meet only on weekends to offer an Islamic education to those students who attend public school during the week. Others, however, offer a religious education alternative to government schools altogether. Both weekend and week-long classes are aimed at sustaining an Islamic identity that has been largely ignored, if not openly disparaged, in the policies, textbooks, and curricula of public schools.¹⁸

Generally speaking, students pay a nominal tuition to the madrasah operator. The remaining costs are borne by community donations, sometimes supplemented through a foreign affiliation. Some madrasah teachers are well educated in Islamic studies, while others have little or no formal education; most madaris have had very little to do with the DepEd, so there are no fixed qualifications for teachers; nor is there DepEd support or supervision.

THE STANDARD CURRICULUM

The legal bases for madaris and their relationship to DepEd is a complex issue, and how the national DepEd and the DepEd ARMM define their respective jurisdictions over madaris is in flux. The recent DepEd Order No. 51 of 2004 orders a “Standard Curriculum for Private Madaris that should incorporate basic education subjects in to the daily schedule of private madaris.” It instructs madaris to merge the government’s basic curriculum (English, math, civics, language), and the madrasah curriculum (Arabic, Qur’an, Hadith, jurisprudence). To date, however, the Standard Curriculum is only a policy. There are no accepted syllabi or instructional materials to support its use in the classroom. A small number of madaris are attempting to introduce secular subjects though their efforts are greatly limited by funding, few if any instructional materials, and no suitably trained teachers.

In theory the Standard Curriculum represents a compromise between the Department of Education on one hand and religious leaders and madrasah operators on the other. It has been the product of negotiation among the national and regional (ARMM) offices responsible for education. The Standard Curriculum, and a broader set of proposed guidelines known as a Roadmap for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education, has not yet received any government funding for implementation. Notwithstanding the controversies over the Roadmap that these bodies are making, these guidelines represent a genuine effort to broaden and improve madrasah education in the Philippines while respecting the deep cultural heritage

¹⁸ Milligan, Jeffrey Ayala (2006), Reclaiming an ideal: The Islamization of education in the Southern Philippines, unpublished draft.

that madaris represent and sustain. One interesting (and controversial) element of the Roadmap is that it does not limit its focus to madaris. In fact, it also prescribes the introduction of Arabic Language and Islamic Values in public schools where Muslims comprise a majority of the student body.

THE USAID ACTIVITY

In late 2004, USAID/Philippines which directs the majority of its bilateral aid to Mindanao, initiated a new project called Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS). Creative was one of the EQuALLS partners asked to assist the mission in launching the multi-partner project.

GOAL

The overall goal of the project was to address educational disparities in the ARMM by improving formal and non-formal policies and education for Muslim communities. One small component of the EQuALLS project called for improving madrasah education.

STRATEGY

Within this challenging and intriguing context, Creative's initial strategy was to introduce basic education (foundation skills) into eight pilot madaris.¹⁹ The madaris operators willing to join the experimental effort wanted to take things one step at a time so as to assess the communities' reaction. They wanted to see whether and to what extent a madrasah could integrate secular subjects and promote

a Filipino identity while still preserving its Muslim heritage. For this reason, the strategy was to introduce the DepEd's Standard Curriculum one grade at a time, starting with Grade I.

In selecting the pilot madaris, an important criterion was the willingness of the madrasah operator to cooperate with EQuALLS and to implement the Standard Curriculum. Project staff met with madrasah operators and held workshops. Among those who understood the benefits of improving the education they offer, as well as the risks inherent in making substantive changes in an institution at the heart of the community, eight were chosen. More than eight were willing to participate, but project resources were limited. In SY 2005-06 total enrolment in Grade I among the eight schools was 253 (57% male, 43% female).

In each of the eight pilot madaris, Creative introduced three interventions: improving the learning environment; providing textbooks and supplementary reading/learning materials; and training teachers.

To launch activities, the project provided big "welcome" banners for each school in the weeks leading up to the opening of the school year in June 2005 (most madaris operate on a similar school calendar as the public school system) and a welcome ceremony at the opening of classes. Some of the pilot madaris had the equivalent of a PTCA, which Creative helped the madrasah operators use as a forum to introduce the new proposed activities. In cases where there was no parent organization, the project

¹⁹ Including those of the Creative project, USAID grantees involved in the EQuALLS project supported about 15 madaris.

helped the school raise awareness among the community, including its religious leaders, of the new activities. It also set in motion a process for each pilot madrasah to apply for DepEd recognition through issuance of a Permit to Operate which requires DepEd inspections of madrasah facilities and records. This is the first step toward DepEd accreditation, and by the end of the year, each pilot school had acquired a permit.

The initial task for improving the learning environment was to assess the infrastructure needs of each madrasah. Madrasah owners, teachers, and parents participated in the assessment, and the result was a prioritized list of repair materials. Creative provided an incentive of materials assistance up to about \$950. In addition to plywood, sheet metal, cement and paint for minor repairs, several madaris also installed toilets. The same fund was also used to procure school bags filled with pencils, pens, crayons, notebooks and other school supplies for incoming grade I students. When the next academic year began in June of 2006, the project provided school desks and a new set of school bags to incoming grade I students, and about 500 textbooks (grades I and 2). These donations engendered an outpouring of gratitude and goodwill from the teachers, parents and students. While books, bags and desks do not improve the quality of education per se, they certainly raise the level of student/teacher motivation, and they can be combined with other quality interventions to improve the overall learning environment and learning outcomes.

Creative intended to train madrasah teachers to begin integrating the Standard Curriculum. It quickly became apparent what a tall order this would be. Although teachers were generally cooperative (recognizing the opportunity to help their students), they had much to learn before they could effectively teach the secular subjects in the new curriculum. When it comes to teaching English, math, reading and the skills related to pedagogy, lesson-planning, student assessment, grading, and classroom management, most madaris teachers have very limited proficiency. The DepEd strategy of upgrading basic education and introducing a standard curriculum for private madaris is dependent on the madrasah teachers' proficiency in the subjects of the curriculum and on their capacity to teach those foundation skills to their pupils. With such low levels of proficiency, madrasah teachers require a credible long-term commitment from DepEd to their professional development. Such a commitment is not yet in place.

With its limited timeframe of less than two years, the project had to set its sights on realistic objectives and available resources. It adopted existing 23-day training in English language proficiency and pedagogy designed in 2005 by DepEd in association with AusAID. This design shared its training curriculum, training materials, and even its trainers with Creative. Thirty-two madrasah teachers and administrators were trained in these sessions. The Creative project also trained teachers in public schools and invited madrasah participants to most of these training sessions in English and math.

Building relationships through consultation on policy

The policy and political dimension of the project proved absolutely critical in 2004-06, as there was significant momentum within the ARMM government to re-write ARMM's Basic Education Law.²⁰ Creative took advantage of this opportunity and provided substantial technical support to the process of legislative review and revision. The lively interest in policy issues gave Creative an opportunity to engage in and support the debate.

As a prelude to the policy forums, Creative conducted research and prepared three reports. One was an overview of major policy issues and constraints affecting basic education, including madaris. The second was a review of education legislation and policy implementation in the ARMM. This review compared ARMM education legislation with national education legislation in order to assess the gaps, contradictions, and recommendations for better "harmonization." The third report examined the institutional and operational effectiveness of DepEd ARMM and made recommendations for strengthening its capacity to improve access and quality in basic education. From teachers and school administrators to Bureau Directors at the regional level, the study revealed many training activities and capacity-building interventions funded by a variety of national and international projects, between 2000-05. While all this investment in training had resulted in improved human resource capacity, the impact on institutional capacity had been more limited.

In an effort to promote dialogue and garner wide public input into a revised Basic Education Law for ARMM, Creative organized forums with DepEd National and DepEd ARMM at a time when each of these institutions was in the throes of defining and advocating its views on reforming madrasah education. Included in these forums were the Accrediting Association of Muslim Schools and Colleges, Inc., the National Federation of Madaris, and many madaris operators.

In 2005 Creative organized workshops with madaris operators to study the requirements of the new Standard Curriculum for Private Madaris, establish guidelines for its implementation in ARMM madaris, and began to discuss how private madaris could achieve formal recognition and eventual accreditation from DepEd ARMM. Perhaps the most significant accomplishment of these workshops was that DepEd, representing the government and the "secular" sector, sat for days with madaris operators, representing the private and "sectarian" sector. Such forthright face-to-face discussions of sensitive issues related to advancing Muslim education had never taken place.

In May 2006 the project conducted a Strategic Planning Workshop to assess current problems and opportunities in madrasah education. Participants came primarily from DepEd National, DepEd ARMM, and private madaris. The DepEd National presented its evolving Roadmap for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education to DepEd ARMM officials and private madrasah operators; the latter group acknowledged concern that the map might lead to state interference in and secularization of community-based madaris.

²⁰ The Organic Law (Republic Act 9054 of 2001) formalized the creation of the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and is essentially ARMM's Constitution. The Organic Law also decentralized educational policy and decision making authority to the region (Article 14) meaning that the Regional Legislative Assembly may pass laws that over-ride national laws. If the RLA does not pass such laws, then National law prevails. However an earlier ARMM Law, i.e. the Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act of 1992 (MMAA No. 14) and the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (RA 9155) introduce a confusing set of inconsistencies and contradictions that ultimately hamper the DepEd ARMM and muddle the relationships between ARMM policy and National policy in the education sector. One of the key constraints identified is that ARMM has not exercised its prerogative to legislate its own educational laws and provisions and thus defaults to national policy and programs without the funds to implement them.

By July the revisions had been compiled and handed to the ARMM Governor to introduce it as a bill for passage by the Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA).

Helping madrasah completers “bridge” to public schools

As discussed earlier, madrasah completers who graduate from full-time, unaccredited madaris have few if any options for continuing their education. They face a host of access barriers (above and beyond the “usual” poverty and opportunity costs), because they tend to be quite weak in English and Filipino languages--the two mediums of instruction in the public school system. This inevitably leads to poor performance, frustration, and dropout. To make matters worse, with no recognized academic record and no recognized paperwork, the madrasah graduate will often face a brick wall when trying to transfer to the formal school system. As a consequence, most students of full-time madaris are not able to transfer into the formal school system at the elementary or secondary level.

Creative introduced strategies to help madrasah completers transfer into the formal school system. When time constraints prohibited the development of a bridging program for madrasah completers, Creative adopted a non-formal education program for bringing out-of-school youth back into the formal education system: the Alternative Learning System (ALS). To test this approach on a limited scale, Creative recruited madrasah completers into regular ALS classes to see how they fared. Minimal adjustments to the classes were made on behalf of the madrasah cohort, though several ALS service providers (particularly the Mus-

lim NGOs) committed to providing madrasah completers with special academic counseling, tutoring, and assistance with school registration.

The target was to reach out to 500 madrasah completers. Through intensive advocacy and social mobilization, Creative and its NGO partners succeeded in recruiting over 1,000 madrasah completers to enroll in ALS classes in April 2006. Though the project ended rather abruptly, these trials revealed the demand for education among Muslim youth and showed promise of accelerated learning methodologies to reach them.

CONCLUSIONS

- Inadequate schools in Muslim communities in Mindanao are the result of historical marginalization of Muslims in a Catholic country. Students are poor, teachers are not well educated or trained, and the infrastructure and support system is weak. In contrast to the CAP activities in India, which were interventions at the community level, Creative’s strategy for improving education in Muslim communities in Mindanao was to support a government-level reform. Improving madaris becomes a political and administrative challenge in the context of cultural sensitivities. As in India, the strategy was a cautious approach with a small number of schools, but concomitant activities to influence policy and administration were more direct.

■ In spite of compromise on the Standard Curriculum and promising experiments with its implementation, the chasm between different visions of education in Mindanao is wide. One perspective is that the Standard Curriculum—combining both secular and religious studies—should be taught in public schools as well as private madaris. Those who support this position argue that Islam is a required element of every Muslim child's education and that it should be introduced in public schools so that parents don't think they need to send their children to a separate religious school to make up for the lack of spiritual and moral instruction in government schools. Once public

schools are acceptable to the entire community, full-time madaris will no longer be needed, and the government can employ former madrasah teachers in public schools. Those who oppose this vision argue that the weak public education system cannot bear the burden of added hours spent teaching Islam.

■ There is optimism for improving political and administrative support for madaris, but this will happen slowly. Cultural and political barriers are slow to recede, and training teachers to give instruction in secular subjects will take time.

In Nigeria, USAID support for basic education in Islamic schools began with the LEAP project (November 2002 to September 2004) and continued with the COMPASS project (May 2004 through May 2009). Creative Associates implements the education component of COMPASS. Funding for work with madaris has totaled approximately \$3 million. Creative's intervention in Nigeria differs from those in India and the Philippines in that many more Islamic schools have participated, and Islamic and public (secular) schools have participated together in the same activities.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nigeria, the country that is home to about 25 percent of Africa's people, is roughly divided between a Muslim north and a Christian south, though both and other religions live throughout the country. About half of the 140 million population, including north and south, are Muslim; the other half are Christian.

Islamic schools appeared in what is now Nigeria sometime between the seventh and ninth century as Muslims migrated southwestward from North Africa. When Britain established its colony in 1861, it set up administrative structures and schools for people in the predominately Christian south but allowed the Muslim Hausa-Fulani people of the north to maintain their traditional social-po-

litical structures, including schools. Because of this factor and other important regional variations in the colony and, later, independent Nigeria, the character and quality of schools varied considerably around the country, and this variation persists today.

The British established a colonial government school system for elites, mostly in the south. This system suffered after independence from the rough political waters of the new country's volatile leadership. In 1976, the federal government declared its goal of universal primary education, but could not meet the demand with an adequate supply of schools and teachers. Consequently, the quality of public education deteriorated and many parents sought private, secular and religious schools.

Qur'anic schools situated throughout the Muslim north and with less density in the south, have maintained a tradition over centuries as small schools attached to a mosque where Muslim children are taught to memorize the Qur'an and become socialized in religious traditions. In many communities, families entrusted their children to the local teacher and proprietor (malam), who, in addition to teaching the children, took responsibility for accommodating, feeding, and clothing them. Parents contributed to the cost, but pupils also earned their keep by working for the malam, doing other jobs and, increasingly in many communities, begging on the streets.

The mission of Qur'anic schools was to teach children and youth their religion. In the 1950s and 1960s, many Muslim families who could afford to do so, supported private initiatives to operate schools that offered both the religious education of Qur'anic schools and the secular curriculum of government schools. These schools—called Islamiyya schools—fared best in urban areas of the south, but they were also introduced in the north. Eventually, they became the conceptual model for Muslim religious schools that offered a modern education.

While government continued its efforts to improve primary education, it had no reach over the growing number of private schools, many of them religious. Beginning in the 1980s, the federal government began to reconsider its relationship with Islamic schools, and in 1998, it laid out a new national policy: With a view to correcting the imbalance between different parts of the country ... efforts shall be made by state governments to integrate suitable Qur'anic Schools...with the formal system...

The reference to state governments indicates a significant fact in Nigeria's federalist system: that primary education is the responsibility of the states, each of which makes policy. The proportion of the population attending Islamic schools, and hence not receiving government support, varies widely from state to state. In 2001, Nigeria introduced mandatory universal basic education. Subsequently, the relationship between state governments and Islamic schools, as well as the changes in Islamic schools, has become more dynamic.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION TODAY

Religious education is an important part of Muslim children's socialization, and families provide for it one way or another. At present there are various permutations of Islamic schools and there exists some inconsistency in the descriptions of how each is labeled and characterized. It is nonetheless possible to make some general distinctions between three kinds of schools: Qur'anic, Islamiyya, and madrasahs.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SCHOOLS

Pre-school age children attend a community-based Qur'anic school to learn to recite the Qur'an and read Arabic scripts. These skills are taught by rote memorization methods, with each student progressing at his or her own pace. Students use a wooden board, black ink, and wooden pens as their ancestors have done for centuries. Classes are held either in the mosque, other community venues, or the home of the teachers.

When they reach school age, some children stay in the Qur'anic schools, while others attend public school in the morning and the Qur'anic school later in the day. Most teachers of Qur'anic schools in rural areas provide accommodations as well. In poor communities in the north, children in these schools continue to beg on the street to support their education, and this has come to be perceived as a critical social problem.

Islamic schools that teach courses beyond those of the traditional Qur'anic schools are known in most of Nige-

ria as Islamiyya schools (and in some areas as Nizamiyya schools). Though there is wide variation among Islamiyya schools, most are more structured than Qur'anic schools, adopting grade levels and teaching pupils at the same pace. Those that agree to introduce secular subjects to the curriculum are classified as Integrated Islamiyya schools. Integrated Islamiyya schools²¹ agree to teach four core subjects from the public school curriculum (literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies) along with their traditional religious curriculum. In some parts of northern Nigeria, once the school is approved by the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), the state pays the salaries of teachers and provides teaching materials in the core subjects. The school agrees to respect state standards and to participate in inspections. A variant of Islamiyya schools more predominant in the south are those that combine the approved secular curriculum with Islamiyya subjects. A major concern in these schools is the lack of standardization of an Islamic curriculum and the employment of less qualified teaching staff as compared to public schools. Unlike ministries of education in other countries that do not allow students from private schools to transit into the government system, Nigeria allows Islamiyya students to enter the public system at any time before grade 9 and to qualify for post-grade 9 education.

In general, Islamiyya schools do not manifest the very poor conditions of Qur'anic schools. There are, however, important regional differences. Islamiyya schools in the Muslim-dominated north are run more like community schools and resemble Qur'anic schools, even if they offer core subjects. Like Qur'anic schools, some Islamiyya

schools are attended by children who also attend public school. By contrast, Islamiyya schools in much of the south, especially in and around urban areas, cater to families that pay more for education, and they resemble other market-driven private schools. These schools are often of better quality than public schools and their graduates tend to perform better on the primary school leaving exam than those of public schools. Some Islamiyyas have better facilities than public schools, but more often, the opposite is true: State support allows public schools to have better facilities, more materials and better trained teachers. However, since teachers in public schools are not compelled to spend much time at school, even poorer Islamiyya schools generally perform better than their public school counterparts. The prominent factor in the difference in quality is that Islamiyya schools are monitored by the parents and community; teachers are expected to be on the job when school is in session and to be responsible for their pupils' education.

The term *madrasah* is used in Nigeria in reference to Islamic schools that go beyond the primary level and move their students into more sophisticated religious studies. They offer more years of education, more depth in religious studies, and their graduates are qualified to enter Islamic universities or equivalent institutions. A *madrasah* education is systematic, organized, and follows an Islamic curriculum. These schools may or may not integrate secular subjects into the curriculum, but their goal is to produce religious scholars.

²¹ For brevity in this report, we refer to these simply as Islamiyya schools.

HOW DO PARENTS CHOOSE A SCHOOL?

In communities wealthy enough to offer a choice of schools, both religious education and school quality are factors in parents' choice of schools. Muslim parents with deep-seated religious beliefs are likely to send children to Muslim schools, even though conditions may be worse than those in public schools. In particular, parents are more comfortable sending their girls to Islamiyyas, where they are often taught separately from boys and social customs regarding boy-girl relationships are respected. Interviews with parents in Kano and Nasarawa (states in the north) reveal that parents prefer Islamiyyas to public schools because they offer better religious and moral instruction, and overall, better-quality instruction. Parents say that Islamiyya teachers care more about their children's education than do those of public schools and that parents care more about the schools than do parents whose children attend public schools.

Parents in urban parts of southern Nigeria usually have more choice than those in the north and in rural areas. An estimated 60 percent of children in Lagos attend private schools. Some more modern Muslim families send their children to secular private schools, but many prefer to support Islamiyyas, where they believe their children receive both a good-quality religious education as well as a secular education. Because of the low quality of public schools and their desire for religious education, even poor families in Lagos are willing to pay the small fees of an Islamiyya school rather than send their children to a more affordable public school.

THE USAID ACTIVITY

After decades of absence from Nigeria's education sector, in November 2001, USAID began providing assistance to basic education through the Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program (LEAP). LEAP was succeeded in May 2004 by the COMPASS project, a combined health and education project with education interventions in three states—Lagos, Kano and Nasarawa. Creative Associates has been implementing the education component of COMPASS.

GOAL

The goal of COMPASS is to improve education in both public schools and Islamiyya schools in selected administrative districts of the three states.

STRATEGY

Neither LEAP nor COMPASS has supported Islamiyya schools as a stand-alone activity. Schools are clustered geographically so that face-to-face services can be delivered economically to geographically proximate groups of schools. COMPASS implemented a range of interventions. The project delivered 90 radio programs in literacy and numeracy for grades 1 through 6. Teachers attended face-to-face training sessions. In these sessions, public and Islamiyya school teachers were trained together in their clusters. It provided face-to-face training in teaching skills: Teachers meet in their clusters once every two months for one day of professional development. The project helped schools form PTAs and gave grants averaging \$2000 per school as incentives for planning and improv-

ing the physical environment of the schools. Teachers and health care workers received training in how to integrate school health and nutrition lessons into the curriculum. The project supported health measures in schools such as deworming, referral services, construction of separate toilets for girls, water tanks, bore holes, etc. Finally, COMPASS developed materials and distributed them to schools within each cluster that were identified as teacher resource centers. Teachers are shown how to make use of these materials and to develop their own no-cost, low-cost materials.

Selection of Islamiyyas

The project budgets allowed for a limited number of schools to participate. In each of the states, Lagos, Kano, and Nasarawa, 37 districts (Local Government Authorities, or LGAs) were selected for participation. Within each district, project staff worked with local authorities to select Islamiyya schools so that the ratio of public schools to Islamiyya schools would be 3:1. Within a total of 1400 schools, 368 are Islamiyyas. The table below shows how many Islamiyya schools, teachers, and pupils are in each district and what portion of all participating schools Islamiyya schools comprise.

The table reveals that Kano, which is in the north, has the greatest degree and rate of participation, especially as measured by pupil participation. Nasarawa, in Hausa-Fulani central Nigeria, has the lowest number and rate. Lagos, a southern state, is close to Kano in number and rate of schools but lags far behind in terms of pupils (due to the large difference in school-to-pupil ratios). In terms of teachers, there almost twice as many participating in Kano (3,360) than in Lagos and Nasarawa combined (1,940).

The projects worked with the SUBEBs to set criteria for participation of Islamiyya schools. The school had to be an Integrated Islamiyya (registered with the state, use the core curriculum; agree to state standards and inspections and operate within the period of the IRI broadcast). It had to have a PTA or be willing to form a PTA, have an ambience conducive to support from outsiders, and be willing to accept supervision.²² On the basis of this selection, project staff assumed that the differences between treatment of public and Islamiyya schools would be negligible.

Adapting to differences between public and Islamiyya schools

As the project progressed, Creative staff found out that there were considerable differences in how schools have

Table 3. Islamiyya schools, teachers and pupils: Approximate totals by state (and as a % of COMPASS schools in the state)			
	Schools	Teachers	Pupils
Kano	188 (31%)	3,360 (37%)	176,430 (44%)
Lagos	144 (27%)	1,400 (16%)	17,700 (9%)
Nasarawa	36 (14%)	540 (16%)	10,410 (10%)
TOTAL	368 (26%)	5,300 (25%)	204,600 (29%)

²² There is avid interest among many Islamiyya schools and even Qur'anic schools in participating in COMPASS activities, but limited funds constrain the number of participants. There are also, however, schools that have no interest in introducing a "Western" curriculum or getting funding from American sources.

responded to project interventions, not only between public and Islamiyya schools, but also among Islamiyya schools. Although we can speak of general differences between public and Islamiyya schools, there are exceptions, often due to regional differences. The general differences between public and Islamiyya schools are in curriculum and language of instruction, schedule and calendar, teachers, and systemic support. As indicated by Nigeria's colonial history, Islamiyyas in the north are more often in poorer more conservative communities than those in the south, and their schools are of poorer quality.

Curriculum and language of instruction. Most public schools teach only secular subjects and go into more depth in the core subjects. Integrated Islamiyya schools teach the core subjects in addition to their Qur'anic curriculum. Thus students, if not teachers, are asked to follow two very different curricula based on different worldviews requiring different pedagogical methods. Islamiyya teachers who participate in COMPASS are expected to know English, although they have had less training in that language. In public schools, English is introduced as a language of instruction in grade 3. In Islamic schools, students study the Qur'an and other religious subjects in Arabic. Thus Islamiyya teachers, especially in the north, are at a disadvantage in COMPASS training.

Schedule and calendar. Public schools are in session Monday through Friday. Some Islamiyyas follow this weekly schedule, while others, especially in the north, meet Saturday through Wednesday, which is a local decision. Public schools follow the solar (Western) calendar, while many

Islamiyyas follow the lunar calendar. These differences do not matter as long as school communities are separate, but they cause scheduling difficulties for COMPASS events that include all participating schools.

Teachers. Public school teachers are certified by government-recognized colleges of education or universities (with few deviations) and have been trained in the core subject matter and in pedagogy. Most also have textbooks and other reading materials at hand. The training of Islamiyya teachers, in contrast, is mostly limited to their secondary school education in an Islamic school, where they were taught by teachers using rote memorization methods and where they become literate in Arabic, not English. Few classrooms have adequate reading materials beyond the Qur'an, and some Hadiths, Fiqh and Islamic history books.

In spite of their relative paucity of resources and training, Islamiyya schools' teachers are generally judged to do a better job. In both Lagos and Kano, COMPASS project staff have found teachers in Integrated Islamiyya teachers generally to be more effective. The main reason is that they are at school when it is in session, punctual in the morning, and present until the day is over. In contrast, teachers in public schools appear to be at school only sporadically, some attending less than eight hours in a week.

The underlying reason for this difference is that Islamiyya teachers are paid by parents and the community. They are also under the authority of the school proprietor, who monitors them closely. It is for these reasons that Islamiyya

school teachers seem to gain more respect within their schools and communities. They are generally more eager for training as opposed to being motivated by external incentives such as per diems for attending workshops.

Girls. Although many Muslim parents prefer to send their girls to Islamic schools, the rate of girls' participation in both Muslim and public schools descends rapidly after the first few grades. The main force drawing girls out of school is economic: families want girls to help in the household.

COMPASS has used some interventions on behalf of girls in both public and Islamiyya schools, including providing them with uniforms, books, other supplies, and separate toilet facilities. The project has helped establish women's wings of PTAs and encouraged women to use these forums to sensitize others to the importance of girls' education. The project has had some success in persuading parents to send their daughters to school in the morning and do their chores in the afternoon.

Adjusting teacher training to different needs

As a result of the differences between public and Islamiyya schools, COMPASS has made adjustments to its teacher training program. The plan to integrate all teachers in face-to-face professional development sessions met with resistance. Some Islamiyya teachers wanted a daily training schedule that would allow them to break for prayers, and in some instances female teachers did not want to sit with male teachers. On the part of public school teachers, some did not want to be together with Muslims. Thus,

while training sessions have been held simultaneously, they have been segregated.

Other differences are more difficult to deal with. Although Islamiyya teachers are eager to learn English and math, their limited training in English and in the content of the core subjects makes it difficult for them to understand the written manuals on teaching methods and the verbal content of the IRI broadcasts in the classroom. These materials are essential as they include instructions for teachers on directing activities. The COMPASS staff believes that new versions of the manuals and IRI broadcasts should be adapted to the actual competence levels of Islamiyya teachers, using instructions in Hausa where necessary, and simplifying instructions in English.

Initially, COMPASS witnessed reluctance among Islamiyya schools towards its interventions. The content of IRI broadcasts, which rely heavily on music and physical activity, including some dancing, to capture the attention of children, seemed blasphemous to some of the more religiously conservative schools. Project staff worked with communities to assure them that the music in the programs drew on songs and tunes that children sang "in the street" and were not offensive to believers. Altogether, because Muslim communities paid such close attention to their schools, COMPASS had to spend more time with them, explaining the objectives of the program and how content related to those objectives. This kind of "resistance," of course, is ultimately beneficial, leading to a good understanding among communities of what is taking place in their schools and why.

The operation of Islamiyyas on a lunar calendar and, in some cases a different weekly schedule, has presented problems in scheduling trainings. In addition, school malams and parents do not like schools to close on the day teachers attend training. Some Islamiyyas operate only in the morning, while others in the same cluster operate only in the afternoon. Islamic religious holidays must also be taken into account.

Systemic support and coordination

A huge difference between public and Islamic schools of every type is that public schools are part of a government system that sets policy, governs its implementation, and provides guidance and support to schools. Islamic schools have no such comprehensive support system at any level—local, district, state or national. As discussed earlier, individual schools may benefit greatly from being held accountable solely to their parents and communities. This is because parents and communities pay for their operation but have little if any access to new theories and methods, or to external guidance and material support that comes from being part of a support system.

What relationship do Islamic schools have with the various support structures in their communities and in the administrative state education apparatus? Here we describe Muslim umbrella organizations that give some support to schools and the Agency for Mass Education, a state agency that provides some support to Qur'anic schools.

Community support: PTAs. Because government and its agents have little access to Islamic schools, COMPASS has been an agent of change for Islamiyyas and has thus had to engage with the communities of these schools on issues of curriculum and girls' education. Its strategy has been to require participating schools to form active PTAs (some had PTAs in name only; others had none) and to persuade teachers to push for change. In this strategy, COMPASS has been largely successful. It has helped schools organize PTAs, elect officers, write constitutions, and set up finance accounts. Many malams and communities have welcomed the opportunity to work together to help PTAs define needs, draw up action plans and apply for and receive project-financed grants. The project organized exchanges among malams, which have helped those who have benefited from PTAs convince others, who fear that their own authority will be usurped, of the value of these PTAs.

Thus, at the school and cluster level, COMPASS has helped Islamiyyas benefit from more systematic links with the community and from networks with other schools.

District-level support. State governments do not provide administrative or technical support to Islamic schools. With the exception of recent arrangements with Integrated Islamiyyas, private schools including most Islamic schools are not registered with government, so their teachers have no access to government-supported pre-service or in-service teacher training. The lack of a network at this level among schools participating in the project has prompted COMPASS to use other means of coordinating its activities. In Lagos, the project staff has informally appointed a

“focal person” in each district to serve as an intermediary between the project and Islamiyyas. The focal person helps communicate and make logistical arrangements for training. This COMPASS support mechanism is temporary, and there is no intention to build and sustain it beyond the project.

State and federal support. The governance of Islamic schools at the state and federal levels is in a state of flux and is a politically sensitive issue.²³ In response to problems associated with Qur’anic schools, the federal government’s Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) is aiming to integrate Qur’anic schools into the system as well as Islamiyyas. These problems stem from the extreme poverty of many Qur’anic school communities, which lead insufficient income for their malams, the practice of sending children out to beg; and methods of teaching that make progress slow for many children. The UBEC is spending roughly \$50 thousand in ten states to get better data on Qur’anic schools, sensitize malams to problems and solutions, train teachers, and provide instructional materials. The National Curriculum Institute has also developed a “harmonized” curriculum, combining the national curriculum with parts of the Islamic curriculum to help bring reluctant malams into the government system.

At the state level, State Universal Basic Education Boards govern and administer public schools. State support to Islamic schools varies among states and seems to be stronger in the north. In at least some northern states there has recently been significant progress made in efforts to provide state support to Qur’anic and Islamiyya schools and to bring them closer to the government system. In Kano,

the SUBEB has a department for Islamiyya education, through which it has registered most schools. The department has developed the curriculum for Integrated Islamiyyas, and it regulates the hours of operation of schools that are registered. In Zamfara, the SUBEB is piloting steps of transition for Qur’anic schools to Islamiyya schools, and it gives support to schools not yet integrated. District governments within the state both second and employ teachers for Islamiyya schools. In Sokoto the integration of Qur’anic schools has been piloted successfully, with support from UNICEF, which has also helped develop a curriculum, primers, and teacher training for these integrated schools. There was initially resistance by some malams as they perceived these interventions to be a “Westernization” of education in their schools. However, this has been largely overcome, since malams have begun to see the benefits of resources that come with state support

In contrast, the southern state of Lagos has done comparatively little to support Islamic schools. Here, where many families can afford a more expensive private education, Islamiyyas are operated more independently and are accountable to families, who pay the fees required to operate. Thus they are less in need of government financial aid but are deprived of systemic support such as teacher training.

In many communities throughout the country, state governments still face the challenge of persuading Islamiyyas of the benefits of registering. Perhaps an even more critical challenge is to supervise inspectors so that they assist these schools in reforming and improving the quality of instruction rather than threatening their existence.

²³ USAID (April 2004), Strengthening Education in the Muslim World, Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, Issue paper #1.

Support from Islamic organizations. There are a number of Islamic umbrella institutions that support Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools. These include the Council for Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools, Ansar ud Deen Society of Nigeria and the Zakkah Commission. In Kano the Council for Islamiyya Schools has actively supported the project. COMPASS has responded positively to a request by the Islamic Society to help it support schools. COMPASS staff believe that in the future this may be a better way to provide systemic support to Islamiyya schools than through clusters that integrate Islamic and public schools, because it would provide better systemic support to these schools than the government can provide.

Islamic schools as non-formal education. Although Qur'anic schools are not part of the formal government school system, they receive support at the national level from the federal-level Agency for Mass Education (AME), which largely focuses on non-formal education. Because girls in Muslim communities are more likely to attend Islamic schools than public schools, UNICEF has supported Qur'anic schools through the AME. With UNICEF support, the AME developed a curriculum for an accelerated program through which Qur'anic schools could elect to teach the primary school curriculum in three years to children who had dropped out of school. Schools that participate in this program receive materials and teacher training.

CONCLUSIONS

- The COMPASS project's activities were designed to integrate government and Integrated Islamiyya teachers in teacher training workshops and to reach them through the same distance learning program. Experience has shown that the differences between these two kinds of schools make such integration difficult. The most critical impediment is the lack of English language skills and knowledge of secular subject matter among some Islamiyya teachers.
- Although Integrated Islamiyya schools are registered with state boards of education, they are not yet getting sufficient systemic support, especially for teacher training and support. Both government and the rest of the education sector are now grappling with the issue of providing systemic support to Islamiyya schools. Unlike Mindanao and some other states in India, the states of Nigeria have not progressed as far toward resolution of this issue.
- The consensus remains that Islamiyya schools generally provide better education than public schools. In spite of far fewer resources, teachers in Islamiyya schools feel accountable to the teacher and parents who pay them, and thus, attend regularly and adhere to the teaching standards expected of them.

USAID's support to Islamic schools in Uganda began in August 2004 under the Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) project and ran through August 2006. In 2007 it was restarted under the UNITY project. Both projects were implemented by Creative Associates. Creative sub-contracted with the Madrasah Resource Center, an NGO based in Kampala, to enhance and expand its support to pre-schools in poor Muslim communities. The activity had a budget of about \$850 thousand.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Madrasah" is generally used in Uganda in reference to schools that offer Islamic education—both at the pre-school and secondary levels. In the context of this report, the term is used in reference to schools for young children, in which they learn to recite the Qur'an. For the most part, madaris in Uganda do not exist in a context where Islamic education has been largely separated from secular education. In fact, Uganda has seen a movement during the past 60 years to integrate secular subjects into the madrasah curriculum.

THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN UGANDA

Although Islam was an established religion in Uganda prior to Christianity and other major religions, Islamic education soon took a back seat to Christian education and

has suffered setbacks in becoming institutionalized. Islam was brought from the east coast of Africa to Uganda in the mid-1840s and Christianity was introduced in the late 1870s. According to current leaders in Islamic education, in the "inter-religious wars that raged in Buganda between 1885 and 1899," the colonial government associated itself with the Christian communities and ignored Islamic culture and education. Even then, the language of instruction became an issue, as Christians associated Swahili with Islam and abolished it.²⁴

As Christian mission schools proliferated in parts of Uganda, Muslim children were taught in the homes of sheikhs or in mosques. Until the 1890s, Islamic education in these madaris paralleled Christian education in the mission schools and was the only education offered to Muslim children. In the late nineteenth century, enterprising individuals opened madaris for young children, funded by small fees from their parents. Some of these schools became more formal and were registered by the colonial government, which gave some assistance to Islamic schools. However, this was insufficient in meeting the needs of children in Muslim communities. In 1935, the number of registered Islamic schools peaked at 18 and began to decline.

In 1944, Islamic leaders created The Uganda Muslim Education Association (UMEA) as an agent of government to mobilize support for schools that cater to Muslims. The

²⁴ Very little, if anything, has been written about Islamic education in Uganda. Much of this account of the history of Islamic education comes from an interview with Abubakar S. Kakembo and Asadu Lutale, who are Secretary General and Chairman, respectively, of the Uganda Muslim Education Association, and a UMEA booklet entitled 60 Years of Ugandan Muslim Education Association, printed by UMEA circa 2005.

organization was registered in 1947 with the purpose of improving Islamic education by “harmonizing” the Islamic and secular education systems. There was agreement among Islamic sheiks that Muslim children and youth would benefit from integrated Islamic and secular curricula as opposed to a strictly Islamic education.

UMEA began to work with schools that had started as madaris and worked to persuade them to include secular education, to register with government, and to seek public funding. It helped schools send teachers from missionary schools and to get funding for capital development, stationary, and books. UMEA also set up regional offices to hire head masters, establish curricula that included both Islamic and secular studies, and monitor the schools. These measures improved the quality of Islamic schools.

In the 1950s UMEA began to open more schools, including secondary schools. It opened its first Muslim teacher training college in 1935 (Kasawo, which became Kibuli in 1954). By the early 1960s, UMEA had more than 180 primary schools—18 junior secondary schools (eight in Buganda, six in Eastern province, two in northern province and two in western province), two secondary schools and one teacher training college (the latter three all in Kibuli).

Uganda's independence in 1962 had a significant effect on education, which had largely been delivered in Christian mission schools. The government merged what had been independent religious education secretariats into its own system, whereas UMEA and the corresponding Christian education secretariats were “relegated” to advocacy and overseer groups.

The 1970s and 1980s were periods of strife not only for the Muslim community but for all of Uganda. In 1971, Idi Amin assumed power and “spearheaded the formation” of the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, which took over the direction of Muslim schools from UMEA. This was the case until 1995, long after Amin had been deposed and government had taken over much of the education sector from religious institutions. In that year, UMEA was revived and returned to supporting schools in Muslim communities and advocacy of an integrated curriculum.

The current leadership of UMEA believes that the growth rate of Islam in Uganda is high and the demand for Islamic education is growing. Muslims in Uganda, who constitute about 15 percent of the population, don't live in one part of the country; they are concentrated in some sub-counties (in Eganza, Jinja, Kamule, Mpigi, Arua) and in parts of Kampala. Many live in relatively poor communities. A number of Muslim communities and schools are in the northern part of Uganda which has been devastated by armed conflict between the LRA and government since independence. Reports of visitors and NGOs working in this area reveal that the district education departments have lost control of many schools. Among these, public as well as religious schools are often largely supported by their communities. In other words, they do not benefit from either government funding or other resources such as teacher training, credentialing and curriculum support.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION TODAY

At present, religious secretariats including UMEA, own 75 percent of the Islamic schools in Uganda. The foundations are no longer government agents but foundation bodies, with an advisory capacity to the Ministry of Education and Sports. Government has established the curricula for its own schools and those owned by religious and private organizations that are “government aided”—those that agree to register and follow government policy in order to receive funding. Government schools include religious education as a subject in the largely secular curriculum. The government allows students of religious and other private schools that are not registered including some Islamic schools, to sit for government exams and thus receive government-recognized diplomas.

Islamic schools, generally receive higher funding from families and communities than do government schools. In 1997, Islamic schools suffered a blow when President Museveni declared Universal Primary Education a national goal and forbade private and community fee contributions to primary education. Most teachers of Islam had been paid directly by parents. Mosques raised their contributions to schools, until gradually government loosened its “UPE” policy, allowing more private contributions.

UMEA’S CURRENT SCOPE, PROGRAM AND AGENDA

Among the Islamic schools in Uganda, 75 percent are owned by UMEA, meaning that they are private, religious, government-aided schools that receive financial and technical support from UMEA.

UMEA’s current agenda follows from its early days: To help “a people totally deprived of education and therefore of status, of means to jobs, of channels to financial and other resources and of self-esteem and confidence, to an achiever platform, capable of playing a role in any arena of national endeavor...” The organization helps mobilize communities to support their schools. As of early 2007, UMEA had 3,500 primary schools, 200 secondary schools, two secondary teacher training colleges and two primary teachers colleges, five technical schools and three universities. Primary teachers in these schools number about 3,500 and not all teachers or students are Muslim.

In some locations, the schools are part of a compound encompassing a mosque and a hospital. The most well established compound is at Kibule in Kampala, where there is a pre-school, primary school, secondary school and secondary teacher training college on an 80-acre plot. The school serves the local Muslim community as well as others; on Sundays it offers religious education for Christians, and the teachers college offers a course for traditional Islamic teachers who want to teach in registered schools but need remedial work in secular subjects. A project in Jinja, a town not far east of Kampala, offers a course for teachers in government or private schools who are Muslim and want to teach Islamic studies.

UMEA’s agenda centers on giving more systemic support to Islamic schools. It has formed a Uganda Muslim Teacher’s Association and is active in supporting schools and teachers, financially and professionally. One of its objectives is to “provide a common syllabus and improve on the quality of teachers” in Islamic schools. UMEA is encourag-

ing schools that operate under its umbrella to establish PTAs as a channel of parental support. Recently UMEA reps met with the Ministry of Education and Sports, along with representatives of the other religious secretariats, to lobby for a policy that requires head teachers of religion-based schools to belong to the faith of that school.

THE MADRASAH RESOURCE CENTER

Another source of support to Islamic schools in Uganda—at the pre-school and lower primary levels—is the Madrasah Resource Center²⁵ (MRC). The MRC program began in 1993 with financial and technical support from the Aga Khan Foundation.²⁶ The MRC aims to improve the well-being of children in marginalized Muslim communities and to help them gain access to schooling.²⁷

The Uganda program opened in the mid-1980s in Mombasa and later spread to other locations in Kenya as well as to Zanzibar. Each country has its own director and program. The MRC program in Uganda is housed in Kampala in a building that serves as a training and demonstration center and a source of materials and other learning aids. The program also serves 53 communities in Kampala and three nearby districts: Mpigi, Wakiso, and Mityana. In 2004 MRC began working in Arua in the northwestern corner of the country.

The MRC's prime purpose is to offer good-quality pre-school (or early childhood education) to Muslim and other children in poor communities. The program helps transform traditional madaris for young children into learning

centers that address children's developmental needs as well as their spiritual (religious) needs. It helps communities establish a center on the land of a primary school.

Traditionally, children in madaris learned to memorize and recite long passages from the Qur'an, even though these passages may hold no meaning for them. In MRC centers, children are taught stories from the Qur'an that have some meaning in their lives, such as morals, values and manners that are part of their everyday experience. The curriculum takes into account that participating children live in poor socio-economic environments and is geared towards assisting the children develop healthy personalities while preparing them for the subsequent school levels.

The MRC begins its work in a community by posting a Community Development Officer, who works with religious and other leaders, sensitizing them to the value of early childhood education and assessing the need for a center in the community. A mosque committee is organized to take responsibility for the center, and parents and others are brought in as volunteers to run it and to teach. After a period of two to three years of intensive support, when the MRC has evidence that the center is largely self-sufficient, it goes through a "graduation" process, though it continues to receive support from the network of graduated schools.

At first the MRC in Uganda restricted its services to the pre-schools it had helped to organize. Eventually the MRC had a new problem to address—parents reported that their children were unhappy when they entered primary

²⁵ Madrasa Resource Centre is the spelling used by the center itself.

²⁶ The Aga Khan Foundation has several activities in Uganda to support the education sector.

²⁷ Mwaura, Peter (n.d.) Madrasa Resource Centre: Making a Difference! Report of the Aga Khan Foundation's Madrasa Regional Research Programme, available at <http://www.mwambao.com/madrasa.htm>

school and asked the MRCs to add primary school classes to their programs. The MRC looked for another solution and began working with the local primary schools to help institute a “transition” program. It brought together teachers and parents of the first three primary school grades to discuss the children’s experience and modify school practices to make them more child-friendly. The MRCs advised both pre-school and primary school teachers on what they might do to help children through the transition. One activity, for instance, involved escorting groups of pre-school children to the primary school before they began the school year to orient them to the facility and the program. The MRC also started a satellite center in a teacher training college to help new teachers add such transition activities to the curriculum so that they would be better prepared for young children entering school for the first time.

The success of this transition strategy came to the attention of the MOES, which shared it with schools throughout the country during the 2007 orientation to the ministry’s new primary school “thematic” curriculum.

THE USAID ACTIVITY

USAID determined in the early 2000s to commit funding to support Muslim communities in African countries; the Uganda mission consulted with the Pre-Primary Department of the Ministry, and with Creative, and opted to support the MRC. Creative first contracted with the MRC in 2004 and over the course of this partnership the MRC had already demonstrated a capacity to provide good-

quality early childhood education in fifty-plus pre-schools.

GOAL

The purposes of the contract with the MRC were, first, to help the MRC improve and expand its own program and, second, to share elements of its program with the Ministry of Education and Sports. The Ministry was developing a framework and curriculum that it could recommend to private pre-schools (the ministry does not have its own pre-schools).

STRATEGY

In line with these purposes, the MRC has undertaken a range of discrete activities. The largest and highest priority activities are the curriculum, related materials, and teacher training. Starting with the curriculum it inherited from the MRC in Kenya, the Uganda MRC has fully developed a curriculum that can be used in both Muslim and non-Muslim pre-schools and piloted it with MRC pre-schools. It has also compiled and pre-tested instructional support materials (including some of its own creation) and a teacher-training manual. In addition, MRC has developed supporting materials for use in advocating among communities practices in health and hygiene, first aid, nutrition, and the role fathers can play in the lives of their young children. It has strengthened the skills of pre-school teachers in child development and management, guidance and counseling, dealing with children’s learning disabilities, and teaching about HIV/AIDS. The approach to training teachers recognizes that they are volunteers, and, since those in Muslim communities teach in the local language

of the region (Luganda, Lugbara, Arabic, Maardi, Kakwa), the manual and some materials have been translated into these languages.

Creative support to the MRC has gone beyond instruction in the classroom to cover the collaboration between the pre-school and its community, which is a critical aspect to MRC model. It has worked through the School Management Committees of the primary schools, to which the pre-schools are attached, helping members learn skills of management, fund-raising, community interaction, and an understanding of how children learn.

The MRC has undertaken an array of other activities, albeit on a small scale, in selected communities. It has assisted pre-school teachers, lower primary teachers, head teachers, and parents in working together to support the transition of children from pre-school to primary school. It has supported parents of children, who have finished their pre-school years, by providing home-based learning activities. It has helped the MRC develop a network of its own pre-schools and other ECD providers, and it has advocated at national, district, and local levels for policies that reflect the MRC program.

Creative support has also helped the MRC link into the Ministry's Teacher Development and Management System (TDMS), which is its structure for providing professional development, innovation, and support to schools. Through Creative support the MRC has developed the first school based at village level and an ECD training center for East Africa, in Kibibi County. At the Kabulasoke

PTC in Mpigi district, the MRC has a Center of Excellence in ECD with a Resource room fully equipped and the pre-service tutors and CCTs fully trained. Creative has helped the MRC institute in some teacher training colleges' modules on the transition from pre-school to primary school. The MRC center in Kampala, which was refurbished by Creative, has opened its doors to Coordinating Center Tutors, sharing demonstrations and materials with them. These tutors are in-service trainers working out of teacher training colleges. Finally, in Arua, Creative supported MRC interventions in a few madaris in this remote and resource-deprived part of Uganda.

The USAID UNITY project, which Creative launched in November 2006, will make a grant to the MRC to enhance its community engagement and parental participation activity. The grant will also help strengthen the MRC's connection with the TDMS through work with additional teacher training colleges and Coordinating Center Tutors. In its effort to improve education quality and relevance of curricula to the Muslim community, the MRC will work more closely with Muslim imams and add a HIV/AIDS education component to the early childhood curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

- While many Muslim communities have supported their own schools outside of the government system, for many years, they have received support from UMEA for integrating secular and Islamic curricula. Subsequently, in a large portion of Muslim schools, children are being taught basic skills of reading, writing

and math in the same manner as children in government and Christian mission schools. At the same time, Muslim children often attend under-resourced schools since they live in comparatively poorer communities. Schools are especially deprived of support and financial resources in the northern conflict-ridden areas, where many Muslim communities also reside.

- In Uganda, 53 communities have been the early beneficiaries of USAID support to madaris for pre-school-age children. Even prior to USAID's intervention, these communities benefited from the exceptionally high-quality services of the Aga Khan Foundation to early childhood education activities. USAID - sup-

ported madaris pre-schools in some communities gave rise to the early childhood curriculum framework and learning materials being used by the education Ministry.

- It is particularly interesting to note that these private religious pre-schools are providing the education Ministry with experience and guidance in early childhood education. The Ministry has adopted in its nationwide training of primary school teachers in 2007 some of the practices pioneered by MRC aimed at helping schools present a friendly face to children entering grade 1.

CONCLUSIONS

The perception of madaris as hotbeds of Islamic fundamentalism obscures the reality that millions of Muslim children attend these schools for the purpose of learning their religion. Madaris are not monolithic institutions. There are measurable differences in madaris, in each country and among countries. While a handful may be subverted for destructive purposes, a significant number are integrating secular subjects into their curriculum, helping private religious schools provide an alternative to public schools as a source of good quality basic education.

Through this study Creative Associates has learned about conditions that hamper the effectiveness of madaris in transitioning economies and societies as well as factors that promote the development of madaris. We have observed potential roles for government and the private sector in improving madrasah education and opportunities for assistance from international agencies such as USAID.

In countries where Islam is a minority religion, many Muslims live in relatively poor communities—those that have been neglected by government and do not receive the same level of services as communities that belong to the majority religion—Christianity in the Philippines, Nigeria and Uganda, and Hinduism in India. Muslim parents in these communities want their children to have a good education—one that includes learning about their religious

and cultural roots as well as basic skills for the modern world. They want their children to feel safe and comfortable in school. They are willing to pay what little they can afford for good schools and teachers.

Thus, Muslim families and communities in places where USAID has funded basic education have welcomed the support. Small-scale interventions in India and Uganda proved to be effective in improving instruction. In Nigeria and the Philippines, larger-scale projects made headway in lowering barriers posed by cultural differences. In all four countries, schools and communities have been willing to work together to improve education.

Conditions that hamper and facilitate madaris' effectiveness as modern schools

With the exception of some parts of Nigeria, our projects took place in poor Muslim communities—often poorer than neighboring communities of the country's predominant religion. Poverty is a critical factor in the low performance of all schools in those communities; schools do not have the financial or human resources they need to teach children the basic skills of reading, writing, math, science and social studies. Additionally, cultural and social discrimination keeps these communities in the backwater of the economy, thus depriving older students of incentives and opportunities to use basic skills from school in the working world. As a result, children in many of these communities

have been deprived of schooling beyond what the local mosque can provide. Because they are not part of the government system, madaris have not been supported by the Education for All initiative, a drive begun in 1990 by the international community to urge governments to provide primary school education to all children. Many have never received government support—financial or technical—nor regulation, supervision or accreditation.

At the same time, madaris have some advantages over other schools. Unlike many government schools in rural areas, which are established by central offices and sometimes viewed by the community as alien structures, madaris are rooted in the culture of village life. The community supports the teacher, and parents see value in what is taught. This indigenous education institution can be built upon, when parents and teachers are ready. Our experience reveals that, while many parents still resist the introduction of secular subjects to madaris and changes to the school as they know it, they also understand that the world now requires their children to learn skills that help them earn a living in the modern economy. Subsequently, they are ready for cautious, culturally sensitive support for adding basic skills to the curriculum.

Alternatives for governments

Among the four governments in the countries we studied, each had a different approach to madaris. Each has made some attempt to provide support to them, though to a lesser extent than support for public schools. In India and Nigeria, which have decentralized state governments,

both federal and state governments play some support role. The Philippines treats Mindanao differently than other regional jurisdictions as it wrestles with the definitions and implications of political autonomy. Uganda, which is relatively less decentralized, is more equitable in its treatment of Muslim schools, though many of these schools are situated in the conflict-ravaged northern part of the country.

There are at least two alternative roles that government can play: extension of service and regulation. For each of these roles there are a range of possibilities and combinations.

Extending government education services is the most common government strategy for reaching Muslim communities. Yet few governments have developed a strategy for sharing services with religious and private schools over the long term. Indeed, the opposite has been true, and most governments are urged to incorporate schools established by NGOs, for which communities were expected to contribute. When madaris gained notoriety for recruiting young men into jihad, some governments and members of the international community advocated and funded an extra effort to improve government schools--especially in areas served by madaris--so that they would attract potential madrasah students to their schools. The weaknesses of this strategy are, first, that reform of the government school system is a long-term and complex endeavor that does not have an immediate impact on school quality; second, that many governments do not have the capacity to reach areas that welcome their help,

let alone those that resist them; and, third, that many parents prefer a religious education, even when government schools are accessible. Finally, governments prefer to support secular not religious education. Yet, as the cases of Mindanao and Nigeria showed most vividly, this is not simply a matter of adding a basic skills curriculum to a religious one. Rather, the process entails merging two very different value systems and cultural approaches to learning.

The issue of governments' relationships with private and religious schools run by entrepreneurs merits more attention. Governments focused on extending services have few resources left for this function, and private and religious schools do not cry out to be regulated. In recent years, some governments have attempted to move in this direction, notably Pakistan, which required all madaris to register with government (this was largely ignored). Some governments, including Uganda, give government support private schools that adopt its curriculum. The potential for a solution to the regulation issue depends greatly on the extent to which non-government schools, particularly madaris, are seen as adversaries of government. Where this is not the case, parents are likely to welcome government's role in setting and enforcing standards and providing information about school performance. But even in countries like India, where students flock to private schools in large numbers, there is little pressure on the government to adopt policies and practices that support and regulate private and religious schools.

How can international agencies help?

USAID is politically, and perhaps constitutionally, constrained in its ability to support Muslim schools: U.S. public funds cannot be seen as flowing to religious schools let alone radical or fundamentalist schools that preach an anti-American message. That said, in many parts of the Islamic world, current U.S. foreign policy is viewed as hostile to Islam. Muslim communities are not seeking support from anyone beyond the Islamic tradition; some Muslim groups supported by Creative projects were reluctant to receive funding that originated from the United States government directly lest they be labeled as representing American interests. Thus the window for assistance from the United States is small.

USAID and other international agencies can help support madaris as they become schools that offer good quality secular education if they approach the challenge thoughtfully and as a long-term endeavor. The work that Creative supported was on a small scale and proceeded cautiously. The NGO in India built upon a relationship it had already established before introducing an education activity. Staff in the Philippines spent countless hours with education officials and communities, facilitating discussion of possibilities. In Uganda and India, local NGOs implemented activities; Creative's role was that of overseer. In the Philippines and Nigeria, Creative worked closely with Ministry of Education officials. In each of these countries project activities were planted and grew within existing organizations. This suggests that future support to madaris as they expand curriculum and instruction to include basic skills and knowledge will succeed if it is channeled through local

organizations with proven effectiveness and focuses on education in the context of broader needs and interests of communities.

Two more lessons emerge from our experience. One is that many communities and government organizations are only now beginning to struggle with the cultural and religious divide among schools. They are not ready for a solution imposed from outside—even if there were one in waiting. Instead, they need support to discuss approaches among themselves, put forth and test competing models and practices, and come to a realization together on what works and what does not. USAID and other international organizations can support forums, pilots and other forms of exploration and conversation about how to raise the level of quality education in madaris.

The other lesson is that the international community can help governments find models of “education for all” that engage private and religious schools systematically in the sector-wide provision of education. This might entail the development and support of systems outside of government, both large and small, that support private and religious schools with teacher training, curriculum and materials development, and the other components of education that need constant attention. The Muslim associations and federations in Uganda, Mindanao and Nigeria might serve as starting points in an effort to expand the provision of good quality education to the entire sector, public and private.

ABOUT US

CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, INC. (CREATIVE)

Creative addresses urgent challenges facing societies today. Whether they are shifts in demographics, the workplace, the classroom, technology, or the political arena at home and abroad, Creative views change as an opportunity to improve. Creative helps clients turn transitional environments into a positive force – an impetus for creating more empowered and effective systems and institutions. Creative approaches change as an opportunity to transform and renew.

Education, Mobilization and Communication (EMC) Division

Around the world, the ravages of war and poverty have left many education systems without textbooks, classrooms, or properly trained teachers – the basics for a child's education. But with an eye on the needs for immediate remedies and long-term foundations, Creative's Education, Mobilization and Communication (EMC) Division has been a driving force in school reform and development that benefits children and the societies that they will someday inherit. From Latin America and the Caribbean to Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, EMC has helped improve student access to education, as well as retention, participation, equity, and quality.

Communities in Transition (CIT) Division

From Latin America and the Caribbean to the Middle East and Africa, Creative's CIT Division – Communities in Transition – helps instill democratic values and processes in conflict-ridden places where youth gang violence, and vulnerable populations are all too common. Since its launch in 1989, CIT has facilitated interaction among citizens and their local governments, in peace initiatives, and in resolving problems locally. CIT supports political stability by helping rehabilitate infrastructure, basic services, and local economies. Key to its success in advancing peaceful transitions is a focus on democracy as a collaborative effort, starting at the grassroots level and up to government agencies. CIT strives to ensure that civil society actors – NGOs, labor organizations, business associations, media, and government stakeholders – have the means to fully participate in democratic processes.



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